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University Relations, "Bike giveaway concludes Speakers and Spokes series" (2007). *University Relations News Archive*. Paper 1002.
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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications

Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer

Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Bike giveaway concludes Speakers and Spokes series

Summary: University of Minnesota, Morris students Jared Walhowe and Rene Maes gave away free bicycles in downtown Morris April 14. The bike giveaway was the third event in the “Speakers and Spokes” series.

(May 2, 2007)-University of Minnesota, Morris students Jared Walhowe and Rene Maes gave away free bicycles in downtown Morris April 14. The bike giveaway was the third event in the “Speakers and Spokes” series. The series consisted of community-building events and discussions focused on creating a more vibrant and sustainable community. This event was designed to give Morris non-campus community members and UMM students a method for both in-town travel and recreation. UMM student Eric Aufderhar co-planned the series.

“Really, the only talking we did was reassuring people that, indeed, these bikes were free...they couldn’t believe it,” said Walhowe, who along with Maes, facilitated Saturday’s give-away. For all three UMM students, Saturday became the easiest part of the project.

“It took a lot of planning...between wrangling-up the bikes...to storing them...then moving them ‘cross-town to the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance (PRCA) building (where they were given away),” said Walhowe.

Although arranging the give-away took weeks of preparation, the bikes were gone in less than half an hour. Of the 14 bikes donated for the giveaway, 10 came directly from the Morris Police Department.

“We were very thankful to Morris Chief of Police Jim Beauregard for all his help,” said Walhowe, who sought out Beauregard to negotiate the donation. The bikes donated by the Police Department were ones the police had long been holding in storage. As expected of long-unclaimed bikes, most were in disrepair. At the end of the day there were still a few bikes left, and some may still be there. If you are interested in picking one up, ask at the PRCA, located at 630 Atlantic Avenue.

The event series concluded with a bike decorating contest and rally. Bikers of all ages decorated bikes and took a ride around town before enjoying the Arbor Fest festivities at the Morris Area Elementary School. PRCA and Eul’s Hardware Hank in Morris provided prizes for the winners of the contest. Other events in the series included a discussion of a local art exhibit at the PRCA and a discussion at the Pizza Ranch about “town-gown” relationships. Students worked with PRCA director Athena Kildegard to learn about event planning and community building.

The events were planned as part of a service-learning project for Jennifer Rothchild’s Introduction to Sociology course at UMM. The service-learning program supports faculty, students, and community partners in creating community-based learning opportunities that meet community needs and student learning goals. About 20 service-learning courses are offered each year at UMM, involving more than 500 students and 30 partnering agencies.

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